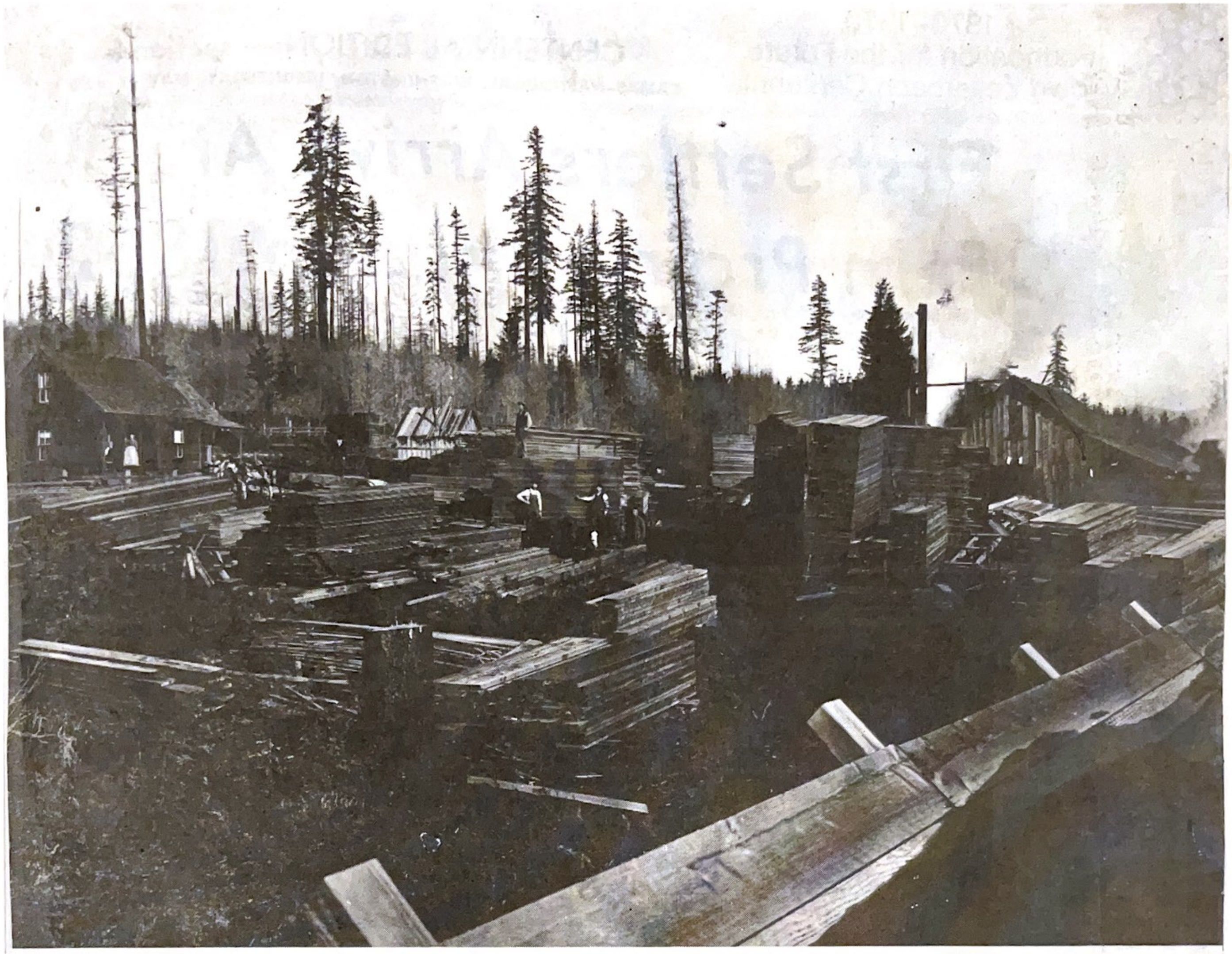

EARLY SAW MILL, believed to be the one that operated at Spear's Camp, just northeast of what today is the Lacamas School site, sawed rough lumber that was later refinished at Peterson's mill. Spear later ran the Camas water system for many years. Picture date is believed to be 1900.

Water, Timber Drew 1st Pioneers

Eighty-seven years ago the first paper mill was built in Camas.

On that date in 1883 the Camas Colony Co., founded by Henry L. Pittock of Portland's Oregonian, selected this as the site to construct a new paper mill. The Oregonian's new press required paper of a new width, unavailable elsewhere and Pittock's eyes had been caught by the water supply available 125 feet above the Columbia river in LaCamas lake.

Work was started at once on a series of dams and on the mill ditch to bring that water to the spot where it was needed to turn machinery and to make paper. Construction on the mill buildings themselves waited until 1884.

Single Machine

The mill was equipped with a 78 inch Fourdrinier machine and produced about 4 tons of newsprint a day, a far cry from the modern Camas output. Soon after this mill was started a 54 inch cylinder machine was moved to LaCamas where it made straw wrappers.

After being in production for 18 months disaster struck. The Sunday Oregonian of Nov. 7, 1886 tells the story:

"Troutdale, Oregon, Nov. 7, 1886. 2 a.m. The Columbia River Paper Co.'s mill at LaCamas, Washington Territory burned to the ground at 10 o'clock last night. It is a total loss aggregating $100,000 to $150,000."

Back in 1888

The mill was rebuilt, even bigger than before, and was back in production on May 3, 1888. The new mill of that day needed 1,000 horsepower to keep it running. The Oregonian said in a description of the LaCamas operation, "Over 5,000 cords of wood annually are consumed at the plant for fuel, and the annual consumption of spruce and cottonwood, which is ground into pulp here, amounts to over 2,000 cords. All the timber is cut in the immediate vicinity of LaCamas...the company employes about 75 men."

The sulphite installations in 1888 consisted of two small digesters, one flat sulphur burner, and one screen. Production was three tons per day.

Since the rebuilding of the mill in 1888, a continuous program has been carried on at the Camas plant. Changes have been made constantly, but some construction highspots are worthy of note.

Bag Factory in 1906

In 1906, shortly after the San Francisco earthquake and fire, the bag factory at Camas was built and equipped with 14 machines. These were located where No. 4 and 5 machines are today. A full scale expansion program was started in 1907, resulting in the addition of new digesters, a building to house them and a jump in sulphite production from 10 to 38 tons per day.

The mill's steam plant was expanded at this same time. Before the new work, horses were used to haul cordwood into the steam plant, and all six 100 h.p. boilers were fed by hand. By 1910 four 500 h.p. water tube boilers were installed and in use, driving the 21 steam engines used to power mill equipment.

In 1913 a huge step was taken when the change from steam to electric power was started. By 1917 all but six of the mill's steam engines had been replaced with electric motors. In 1920, owing to the large quantity of hog fuel available, the steam plant was equipped with furnaces and draft machinery capable of using such fuel.

Wood Mill Changes

Change in the woodmill dates from 1914. Until that time logs were hauled from the river on a wood pole slip by a donkey engine. The slip was located about where the old wood mill stands today. The early mill was equipped with vertical steam splitters and with disc barkers. Some barking was also done with spuds and axes.

A long haul was installed in 1914, along with two drag saws and two more vertical splitters. Additional equipment was added in the next few years, but in 1920 the firm drum barker was put into use.

Steady progress was made through the years with the addition of new machines, new pulping equipment and new methods. The first Jensen tower system was built in 1920, and in 1924 the first sulphite pulp bleaching unit was installed.